

## **Opening plenary: Degrowth for Ecological Sustainability and Social Equity**

Leipzig Conference, 02/09/2014

<http://programme.leipzig.degrowth.org/en/degrowth2014/public/events/40>

## **Opening speech by Federico Demaria (Research & Degrowth, ICTA UAB)**

Min: 6.00-12.35

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t96Wot-CJcM>

Right from the start, this conference is already a success.  
Congratulations and thanks to the local organizing committee!

Nowadays, Degrowth (and its conferences) are flourishing,  
but Degrowth is certainly not new.

The historical roots can be traced back in very old world traditions and philosophies.  
The first to use the word was Andre Gorz in the 1970s during the debate on limits to growth.  
However, it was only at the beginning of the 2000s, that French environmental activists launched 'Sustainable Degrowth' as an activist slogan.  
Nowadays, Degrowth is not only a European movement but is becoming a world movement.

Degrowth is a 'missile word' to repoliticize environmentalism and the fake consensus around 'sustainable development' or even worse, around "green growth" - the super-oxymoron.

Since then, Degrowth is placed at the junction of several sources (or streams of thought) which cross each other without being in competition, such as social and environmental justice, ecology, democracy, ecological economics, critique of development and the objective of well-being (or Buen Vivir or Sumak Kawsay, with equivalent expressions in so many other languages).

Degrowth is about breaking away from myths and false solutions, such as economic growth; but it is also about constructing in solidarity new and diverse imaginaries.

Since 2008, Research&Degrowth has promoted the international conferences on degrowth. The intention was to have regular and recognizable events, where scholars, civil society and practitioners come together to update each another on their degrowth-related activities and research. We decided to call them "International conferences on degrowth for ecological sustainability and social equity". Degrowth, in fact, is a desired direction for societies, but not the final end. The basic idea is that societies will use less materials and energy, and will organize to live radically differently, in solidarity, voluntary simplicity and conviviality.

Since Degrowth was launched as a slogan, a decade ago, many initiatives have been organized at the local level, in cities and in the country side.

The movement spread and the concept has entered the academic debate with over 100 articles and 7 special issues of academic journals.

It is also being discussed in the political arena and mainstream media.

All this, contributes to explain where we are today, together with the circumstance of the so called 'crisis' as if it was unexpected, temporary and reversible, instead of manufactured.

We live under the rule of Debtocracy but we know that there are no social-democratic Keynesian solutions to the economic crisis and even less to the social and environmental crises.  
In Europe, the United States and Japan we cannot force the economy to grow in order to pay for the

mountain of debt.

A large part of the debts cannot and will not be paid for.

We can live well with some degrowth, with social solidarity, and without such a burden of debt. There are social and political movements in the South and in the North pushing in this direction. Degrowth must be closely allied to environmental justice, ecofeminism and the commons. Alliances must be established with movements such as Via Campesina, with urban squatters and guerrilla food gardeners, and also quite often with the industrial workers' unions.

So-called economic growth implies dispossession of indigenous peoples and peasants in countries like India and many others, and the increasing exploitation of a large proletariat, often female, with industrial tragedies such as last year in Bangladesh.

On the environmental front, Degrowth is needed also because the exploitation of natural resources is increasing in the world. Many people are killed defending the environment. We -in Europe- must be aware of this.

Nowadays most political, economic and intellectual leaders assure us that nothing fundamental can be questioned.

It is time for a new vocabulary.

As a product of the international conferences, Research&Degrowth has edited a book titled "Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era".

It presents and explains the different concepts and lines of thought, imaginaries, and proposed courses of action that together complete the panorama of Degrowth as a movement.

It demonstrates that Degrowth is now consolidated as a research area and as a field of social and political activity.

A new vocabulary is a first step towards the key political challenge: taking back the power to imagine and build a post-capitalist and *Post-Wachstum* society fit for human beings, and other species, to live and prosper in it.

On the international conferences, an international loose Degrowth network already exist. And the future of degrowth is in your hands.

Soon after this conference, we will make an Open Call for the organization of the 5<sup>th</sup> International Degrowth Conference to take place in 2016.

We wish people to plan an equally ambitious and well organized conference for 2016.

More in general, learning from feminists, we should focus on Care.

In the last two years, the local organizing committee in Germany has put a lot of efforts in 'taking care' of the Degrowth movement.

Now, these days, it is your turn to actively participate and think of how you can contribute to taking care of Degrowth.

These days, and in the future.

With this, I wish you all a wonderful and fruitful conference and, once again,

I want to stress our gratitude to the members of the local organizing committee for giving us the chance to be here.

*Long live convivial degrowth!!!*

*Vive la Décroissance conviviale!!!*

*Viva la decrescita conviviale!!!*

*Viva el decrecimiento convivial!!!*

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END

**More information:**

Research&Degrowth: [www.degrowth.org](http://www.degrowth.org)

“Degrowth: a vocabulary for a new era” edited by Giacomo D’Alisa, Federico Demaria and Giorgos Kallis (Routledge, 2014).

<http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9781138000773/>

[www.vocabulary.degrowth.org](http://www.vocabulary.degrowth.org)

More info about the Opening session:

<http://programme.leipzig.degrowth.org/en/degrowth2014/public/events/40>

Video:

1) Opening Session (Federico Demaria, Min: 6.00-12.35)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t96Wot-CJcM>

2) Questions/Answers and Debate

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k8G1LbJ64PE>

Alternative video (but lower quality)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbYVLLyrSak>